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NOVA SCOTIA Government of Nova Scotia

GovernmentPleased with Result of Teachers' Vote

Department of Education and Culture (to July 99)

January 24, 1998 9:20

The Nova Scotia government is pleased with the teachers' vote to accept a new collective agreement, negotiated by the province and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. The achievement marks the first major contract to be ratified provincewide, covering 10,000 teachers, approximately one-fifth of the provincial public service.

Education and Culture Minister Robbie Harrison said teachers deserve to be treated fairly, and teachers want government to invest in priorities that support their students. He said this agreement supports both objectives.

"We look forward to working with our teachers on shared priorities -- smaller class sizes, more support for junior high students, and more program choices for high school students, as just a few examples," said Mr. Harrison.

Human Resources Minister Allister Surette said, "The teacher's support for this agreement shows that through collective bargaining the government and unions can reach fair and reasonable collective agreements."

Highlights of the two-year agreement include: 6.9 per cent raise over two years; tighter controls on group health insurance plans; added adoption and family leaves; insurance benefits for eyeglasses, hearing aids and paramedical and psychology services; gains for substitute teachers; added opportunities for term contracts and semestering; support for the principle of individualized program planning for students with special needs; and agreement to work together on issues including distance education, adult education and an employee assistance program.

The agreement was reached after more than six months of negotiations between the government and teachers union.

- 30 -

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-30-

New Collective Agreement for Nova Scotia Teachers --Backgrounder

INTRODUCTION

Nova Scotia teachers have ratified a new collective agreement, reached by the provincial government and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU). This negotiated agreement, reached at the bargaining table and without third-party assistance, is a significant achievement that will benefit teachers and education. It marks the first full collective bargaining session in seven years, and the spirit of co-operation and goodwill at the table can now carry over to future discussion on many issues of common interest and concern. This will enable all education partners to focus efforts together on continuing to build the quality of education for students in the classroom.

The agreement has a two-year term, extending to Oct. 31, 1999. It touches on approximately 30 issues, many of them housekeeping or administrative details, but also important to reflect current practices and legislation and add clarity as needed within the collective agreement. Legal text is now being finalized, and will be printed and published in English and French. The full agreement will be printed and published. The following are the highlights of the main issues covered in the agreement.

AGREEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Salaries & Benefits

All active permanent, probationary and term teachers will receive a three per cent increase, effective Dec. 1, 1997. On Aug. 1, 1998, teachers will receive a 1.9 per cent increase, and a further 1.9 per cent increase on April 1, 1999. Salary increases have been considered as part of the 1998-99 provincial budgeting process.

Benefit changes include: changes to parental (consistent with current Labour Standards Code) and adoption leaves, and increased insurance benefits for eyeglasses, hearing aids, and paramedical and psychology services. As well, a male teacher may now have two days' leave (up from one) for the birth of his child.

Teachers may now apply for six months or 12 months of deferred salary leave, to add flexibility in recognition of semestering. In the past, teachers could only apply for a year's deferred salary leave. Teachers have also gained the right to grieve inaccurate comments in their personal files.

Management of Group Health Insurance Plans

Changes have been negotiated to respond to the auditor general's recommendations respecting management of the group health insurance plans. Specifically, the changes ensure that:

- the province can properly participate in decisions related to

the management of the plans, and

- employer contributions are used solely for benefits as defined in the collective agreement.

As well, a letter has been included to the collective agreement ensuring "a full, timely and regular supply of information concerning these plans to the department."

Services for Students with Special Needs

An article has been included, recognizing the principles in the department's special education policy manual. The article also recognizes and supports the role of teachers in Individualized Program Planning for students with special needs.

Distance Education

Distance education is an emerging way to deliver education programs, offering a wider range of program choices to more students. At the same time, the role of teachers in delivering distance education is critical to student success. A new article has been included in the collective agreement to guide the delivery of distance education, and a standing committee will be struck to address issues that arise in distance education as it continues to evolve.

Certification

Changes to certification articles were made to reflect current licence levels and other administrative issues.

As well, during the six months at the bargaining table, both parties discussed many issues of mutual interest, including teacher certification. During that time, a certification advisory committee consisting of representatives of the department, the Nova Scotia School Boards Association (NSSBA), the committee of deans and heads of teacher training institutions, and the NSTU has been meeting regularly to discuss issues.

All parties agree changes are needed in teacher certification -both to support the professional development of teachers and to ensure teachers have the qualifications they need in today's classrooms. This can be achieved most effectively -by all partners -outside the collective bargaining process. Any required regulatory changes will also be examined.

Evaluation of Teaching Staff

In instances where new evaluation systems are being introduced, principles for a fair evaluation process have been agreed upon to form the basis for formal teacher evaluation by school boards. (These principles are from "Successful Teacher Evaluation", Thomas McGreal, 1983.)

Term Contracts & Secondments

Teachers will have more opportunity to fill vacancies through "term contracts" as opposed to substituting. This also helps school boards looking for innovative ways to deliver programs in the best interests of students (semestering is one example). The ability to offer term contracts will assist in recruitment and is a reflection of the nature and length of the teaching assignment.

By recognizing the principle of secondments within the collective agreement, teachers will have more professional development opportunities and school boards will have more flexibility in bringing the expertise of their classroom teachers to other school board projects.

Substitute Teachers

Substitute teachers will see increases in their flat (daily) rate of pay from $100 to $105 and $125 to $130, and will see a 1.9 per cent increase on Aug. 1, 1998, and a 1.9 per cent increase on April 1, 1999. As well, there are allowances to give substitutes more opportunities for continuous or unbroken service when they are teaching for extended time periods.

Maintaining A Safe Learning & Teaching Environment

A letter of understanding has been included, recognizing the importance of maintaining a learning and working environment that is free of harassment and abuse. Specifically, a Harassment and Workplace Abuse Committee will be formed to support school boards in meeting their responsibilities in protecting students and employees from harassment and abuse. This will support the work already being carried out by school boards, consistent with the new Education Act.

Areas for Further Study

Adult Education - Adult education is recognized as an important extension of educational services provided by school boards. Both parties agree to review how adult education can best be delivered and sustained in future.

School Day for Teachers - A joint "School Day for Teachers Committee" will be formed with equal representation from the Department of Education and Culture, NSTU and the NSSBA. The committee will report by Feb. 1, 1999, with recommendations on the range of issues related to the school day, including classroom time, student evaluation, supervisory responsibilities, meetings, etc.

Employee Assistance - A joint advisory committee will be struck on an employee assistance program that updates the current program, which is limited to employee assistance in the areas of alcohol and drug rehabilitation. Modern employee assistance programs are broader than these areas, and the committee will report to the Department of Education and Culture, NSTU and NSSBA within a year.

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-30-

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